

GUIDE FOR SENIORS:

Home-Proofing for COVID-19 and the Flu

Disinfecting Packages, Deliveries and Inside the Home

Both COVID-19 and the seasonal flu pose dangers to seniors' health. Fortunately, home-proofing measures such as disinfecting frequently touched surfaces help keep them safe.

Of course, many seniors live with other people such as their adult children and young grandchildren. In these cases, home-proofing becomes even more of a group effort. Everyone in the household should wash their hands regularly and have a plan for disinfecting packages and frequently touched surfaces. Depending on the severity of the situation, it might be necessary for people in the household to take additional measures such as limiting their contact with seniors or even the outside world.

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What You Need for Home-Proofing

Home-proofing involves plenty of disinfecting and handwashing, so keep disinfecting wipes, paper towels, soap and other supplies on hand. Aim for at least two weeks' worth. A month's worth is ideal, especially if you cannot/do not shop often.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING SUPPLIES

- *EPA-registered household wipes and disinfectants such as Lysol multi-surface cleaner*
- *4 teaspoons of liquid bleach per quart of water*

- *Bleach tablets*
- *3% hydrogen peroxide*
- *70% alcohol solutions or rubbing alcohol*
- *Disposable gloves (or reusable gloves used only for cleaning and disinfecting)*
- *Paper towels*
- *Wipes or wipeable covers for electronics*
- *Disposable or washable bag liners*
- *Soap or cleaning detergents*
- *Laundry detergents*
- *Brooms*
- *Mops*



You might not need *all* of the supplies listed above. For instance, if you have disinfecting wipes and sprays, it's OK to skip the bleach, hydrogen peroxide and alcohol solutions. Of course, it's always good to have backups. Wipes and sprays might get expensive and don't last forever.

As for laundry detergents, your usual laundry supplies should do fine. Just wash your clothes on the highest possible temperature setting.



Supplies that *don't* help in disinfecting include vodka, homemade hand sanitizer, tea tree oil and distilled white vinegar.





Are the directions on your cleaning and disinfecting products too small to read? Head over to

<http://www.smartlabel.org/products>.

Type your product brand name into the search bar. Suppose you bought Lysol disinfecting wipes. You'd type, "Lysol," into the search bar.

(Unfortunately, if you type, "Lysol disinfecting wipes," no results come up.)

So, the resulting list from, "Lysol," includes lemon advanced cleaning disinfecting wipes—that's yours! Click on the entry and then on the "[Usage & Handling](#)" tab. Scan down for "Directions for Use." You'll see that there are directions for cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting. To disinfect, allow the surface to stay wet for four minutes and air dry.

HANDWASHING SUPPLIES

- *Bar, liquid or gel hand soap*
- *Paper towels*
- *Hand towels*
- *Hand sanitizers*
- *Timers*



GENERAL SUPPLIES

- *Tissues*
- *Toilet paper*
- *Face masks*
- *Moisturizing lotion*
- *Touchless wastebaskets*

You should also keep nonperishable food and over-the-counter medications for fevers, coughs and colds. If you have conditions such as diabetes, make sure that enough medications and medical provisions (e.g. blood glucose meters) are on hand. Adequate supplies prevent excessive trips, a big part of home-proofing.

Best Practices for Daily and

Weekly Home-Proofing

Other than handwashing, the best thing for home-proofing is for household members to limit their contact with the outside world. That's not always realistic, so it's hugely helpful to disinfect frequently touched areas at least three times a day. If multiple members live in the household, disinfecting should occur even more frequently.

DAILY HOME-PROOFING

- *Disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces three times a day.*
- *Wear gloves when disinfecting.*
- *Use tissues to cover coughs and sneezes, or cough/sneeze into the crook of your elbow. People with persistent coughs may want to wear face masks to reduce exposure to others in the household.*
- *Throw used tissues away in a lined, touchless can or wastebasket.*
- *Remove shoes before entering the home.*
- *Handwash throughout the day for at least 20 seconds, including after you arrive home.*
- *Use moisturizing ointments on hands so that soap and sanitizers work effectively.*
- *Keep windows open when possible*

to increase ventilation.

- *Avoid communal food such as bags of chips.*

A few of these steps might be difficult. For instance, some seniors need help removing their shoes, or they may have weak grips that make cleaning and disinfecting difficult.

Do what you're able to. Don't stress if some steps are unrealistic. Instead, focus on the big picture. For instance, if you cannot remove your shoes before entering the home, can you find a place inside that's close to the door? Could you wear other shoes that are easier to slip out of while remaining safe to wear outside? If others live with you, can they do the disinfecting? Can you limit your visitors and errands so you don't need to disinfect as often?

During pandemics such as COVID-19, family members who don't live with you might want to come in daily for disinfecting and to visit. That may be OK sometimes (but is not ideal). These relatives should greatly limit their outside contact and exposure. You would ideally be the only person outside of their household they have sustained contact with. A relative who works as a grocery store cashier or as a nurse should *not* come in to disinfect since they come into contact with many people each day. Practice physical distancing (staying 6 feet apart) when family members come over. If needed, they can wear masks for another layer of safety.

FOR HEALTHY, YOUNGER PEOPLE IN THE HOUSEHOLD

- *Act as if you're a risk to the senior and conduct yourself accordingly based on the severity of the situation.*
- *Wash your hands often, especially before feeding, caring for or interacting with seniors.*

- *Try to designate a safe, seniors-only space in the house.*
- *Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces at least three times a day.*

WEEKLY HOME-PROOFING

The majority of weekly home-proofing relates to grocery shopping, medical appointments, errands and the like. During epidemics and pandemics, you may need to cut trips to the bare minimum. Depending on how bad the situation is or if you're not vaccinated, you might need to eliminate trips altogether for a while.



How Seniors Can Restrict Contact with the Outside World

- *Designate just one person in the household to grocery shop and run other errands.*
- *Eliminate visitors, if possible. Otherwise, limit the number of visitors, and take strict safety precautions with them.*
- *Consolidate daily errands into once-weekly trips.*
- *Use phone and video options for telehealth appointments and other appointments.*
- *Use phone and video to chat with friends, family members and others.*
- *Work from home, if possible.*
- *Require that any people moving in self-isolate or quarantine for least a week before entering.*
- *Skip cleaning services and other in-home services unless absolutely necessary.*
- *Walk and exercise outside but stay 6 feet away from others.*
- *Arrange for medication mail orders and grocery/meal deliveries or pickups instead of shopping in person.*

To expand on the last point, it's safer to have groceries and meals delivered to your home rather than you going out to shop. The more people you encounter, the higher your risk of infection. Fortunately, mail order prescriptions are widely available, and many places during the COVID-19 epidemic are doing curbside/drive-thru pharmacy pickups. If you do conduct your own errands such as grocery shopping, take a few precautions:

- *Wash your hands upon getting home.*
- *Put groceries on a cleanable*

surface.

- *Unpack the groceries.*
- *Clean the surface.*
- *Wash your hands again.*
- *Use a disinfecting wipe on cans, glass jars, plastic tubs and the like, or put groceries in containers you keep in your home.*

Other weekly home-proofing steps include:

- *Cleaning frequently touched surfaces*
- *Disinfecting frequently touched surfaces if you don't do that daily*
- *Sweeping and mopping the floors or vacuuming carpets*
- *Self-isolating and separating from household members who have come down ill*



If someone in a senior's household becomes sick with the flu or COVID-19 (or if seniors themselves do), separation is hugely important. Aim for separate bedrooms, bathrooms, beddings, phones and so on. Don't even share pets.

- *Just one designated person should care for the ill person.*
- *The caregiver and sick person should wear facemasks when interacting, if possible.*
- *The caregiver and sick person should avoid contact when possible (for example, with the caregiver leaving meals at the sick person's bedroom door).*
- *The sick person should have plenty of supplies on hand to care for themselves as necessary (tissues, over-the-counter medications, thermometers and the like).*
- *The sick person should limit their movements throughout the home (for example, using the bathroom and bedroom only, not going into the living room and kitchen).*
- *At least 24 hours after the sick person recovers, it's fine for their laundry and dishes to be placed into the washer with other household members'. However, people doing the*

washing should not hold dirty laundry close to them. They should wash their hands immediately after touching objects the sick person did.

- *At least 24 hours after a sick person recovers, their bedroom and bathroom should undergo a thorough cleaning and disinfecting, including frequently touched objects and surfaces, floors, clothes, books and smartphones.*
- *Members in the household should give the ill person plenty of time and space to recover. It's counterproductive to pressure people into getting up and about when they're still sick and potentially contagious.*

Sick people should follow their doctor's recommendations for when it's safe to emerge from isolation and rejoin the household. Twenty-four hours is just a loose guideline.



How and Why to Disinfect Packages and Deliveries

The risk of coronavirus transmission through packages and deliveries is low. Of course, that still means there is a risk, especially for seniors and other-high risk groups. For example, coronavirus can live on cardboard for up to 24 hours, according to a UCLA study.¹ However, it degrades quickly; virus particles on a cardboard package are fully viable for just three hours. Meanwhile, the virus can remain on plastic and stainless steel for up to three days, again with a quick rate of degradation.²

The bigger threat is person-to-person transmission. That's why postal employees are likely to ask you to step back or close the door while they leave packages. If they don't—make these requests yourself!

The postal service has also adjusted its customer signature procedures. You never need to touch a stylus or screen, and FedEx and UPS have stopped requiring signatures.

A second threat is the surfaces you touch on the way to retrieve a delivery. Disinfect door handles, elevator buttons and the like when you can, especially if they're shared or in an apartment building. Bring hand sanitizer. Wash your hands as soon as you're back inside your home.

FOR LETTERS AND NONPERISHABLE DELIVERIES

This shorter method doesn't eliminate quite as much risk as the longer method.

- *Open letters and packages while you are outside of the home.*
- *Avoid hugging letters and packages close to your body.*
- *Dispose of envelopes, outer packaging and other packaging components you don't need before re-entering the home.*
- *Wash your hands immediately.*

Here is the longer, safer method.³

- *Let packages sit for at least three hours to reduce the chances of you breathing in any airborne particles left by the delivery person.*
- *Put on gloves to move packages to a secure outdoor location such as the back yard, a deck or a balcony.*
- *Avoid hugging packages and items close to your body.*
- *Remove your gloves and dispose of them outside. Wash your hands right away.*
- *Leave cardboard packages for 24 hours. Leave plastic for three days.*
- *Return to the safe location to open packages.*
- *Wear gloves.*
- *Run a disinfecting wipe or a paper towel with 70% isopropyl alcohol over packages before opening them.*
- *Use disinfecting wipes or 70% isopropyl alcohol on the items inside packages.*
- *Dispose of gloves, outer packaging and other packaging components you don't need before re-entering the home.*
- *Wash your hands immediately.*

If feasible: Leave items in opened packages in the safe outdoor location for up to three days. For even more security, wash your hands for the next two weeks each time you handle the items that came in your package.

FOR PERISHABLE DELIVERIES

- *Follow as many of the steps as you can for nonperishable deliveries.*
- *Put your perishable delivery directly in the refrigerator to avoid it touching tabletops, countertops and other surfaces.*
- *If feasible: Keep your newly arrived perishable food away from other items in the refrigerator. Wait one to three days. Wipe down the package with a*

disinfecting wipe or 70% isopropyl alcohol before you open it.

Are Deliveries from Local Restaurants Safe?

Yes! In fact, ordering delivery is safer than venturing out to grocery stores. With delivery, you interact with one person, maximum. More likely, you won't interact with the delivery person at all.

- *Use contactless delivery to have the food left on your doorstep.*
- *Transfer your food to a plate kept in the house.*
- *Throw away the food containers.*
- *Wash your hands before eating.*

One more thing: Many restaurants are doubling down on their sanitization efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. These efforts make it even more likely that your food is safe.

COVID-19 and seasonal flu are respiratory viruses passed through airborne droplets. These droplets can land in food, but they won't multiply. (It's a different story for salmonella, E. coli, shigella, norovirus, and the virus that causes hepatitis A.)

Deep-Cleaning and Disinfecting Surfaces, Doorknobs and Other Frequently Touched Objects

It's good practice to disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces at least three times a day. In your home, such surfaces and objects include these:



- *Handrails*
- *Cellphones*
- *Remote controls*
- *Light switches*
- *Doorknobs and door handles*
- *Sinks and taps*
- *Toilets and toilet handles*
- *Desks*

Countertops

- *Keyboards and mice*
- *Eyeglass arms*
- *Kitchen sponges*
- *Dishcloths*
- *Soap dispensers*

If surfaces are dirty, clean them first, then circle back for disinfecting. It's probably fine to clean once weekly but do try to disinfect every day.



CLEANING VS. SANITIZING VS. DISINFECTING

Cleaning is about removing contaminants such as dirt, grease, food residue and bacteria. Sanitizing aims to reduce or kill bacteria but does not necessarily reduce or kill viruses. Meanwhile, disinfecting is about killing viruses, bacteria and parasites.⁴

Clean before you disinfect. Otherwise, disinfectant won't penetrate contaminants as effectively.

Wipes are easier for disinfecting since you can simply wipe surfaces down and let them dry. Unfortunately, wipes get expensive. For DIY disinfectant, go with 4 teaspoons of bleach per quart of water.



DISINFECTING WITH BLEACH

Bleach is extremely tricky to work with. Things could easily go wrong, but bleach might be in stock while other disinfectants are not. To stay safe, follow these guidelines from organic chemist Richard Sachleben:⁵

- 1 Clean first with water and cleaning detergent to prevent dirt, grease and other fragments from deactivating the bleach.*
- 2 Mix bleach only with water—nothing else—except laundry detergent if you are doing laundry.*
- 3 Use bleach tablets if liquid bleach is not available.*
- 4 Dry surfaces and objects after cleaning them.*
- 5 Wear gloves.*
- 6 Disinfect with the bleach, let it sit for at least 10 minutes, then wipe surfaces and objects down.*
- 7 Rinse with water afterward to prevent discoloration and damage.*
- 8 Don't keep bleach solutions for more than a day after you mix them, or they*

lose potency and break down plastic containers.

If you use disinfecting sprays, let the liquid sit on objects/surfaces for three to 10 minutes before you wipe them down with a paper towel. Follow manufacturer instructions! There may be two sets of instructions, one for cleaning and one for disinfecting. ***Do not use sponges or cloths—they just spread viruses and germs around.***

For cellphones, tablets and other electronic devices, disinfecting wipes should do fine. Apple explains, “Using a 70 percent isopropyl alcohol wipe or Clorox Disinfecting Wipes, you may gently wipe the hard, nonporous surfaces of your Apple product, such as the display, keyboard, or other exterior surfaces. Don't use bleach. Avoid getting moisture in any opening, and don't submerge your Apple product in any cleaning agents. Don't use on fabric or leather surfaces. “

When cleaning electronics such as keyboards and mice, unplug what you can and remove batteries. Turn keyboards upside down to get rid of debris. You may need to apply clear tape or compressed air for another level of cleaning. Wring your disinfecting wipe to get rid of extra liquid and wipe down your devices.

TIPS FOR DISINFECTING:

- *Wear gloves.*
- *Follow manufacturer directions, always. Use the recommended concentrations, application methods and contact times.*
- *Use one wipe (or area of wipe) per object or surface.⁶*
- *Spray disinfectant onto couches, carpets and other soft objects, and wait for it to dry.*
- *Use unexpired products. Items that have expired are not as effective.*
- *Wear disposable gloves.*

- *Wash hands thoroughly after throwing away gloves.*



The CDC recommends certain steps for glove removal.⁷

- 1 *Grip the outside wrist of one glove. Don't touch your exposed skin.*
- 2 *Peel the glove away so that you pull it inside out.*
- 3 *Use your gloved hand to hold the glove you just took off.*
- 4 *Insert your fingers inside your remaining gloved hand to peel it off.*
- 5 *Turn the second glove inside out, keeping the first glove inside the second.*
- 6 *Dispose of the gloves.*
- 7 *Wash your hands thoroughly.*

Deep Cleaning vs. Disinfecting Frequently Touched Surfaces and Objects

Deep cleaning is a reassuring-sounding term, but you're doing just fine by cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces. The Los Angeles Times explains the issue:⁸

The term sounds official, but it isn't. It has no standardized definition.

One company says the right approach is using a mechanical sprayer or thermal fogger that mists disinfectant into the air, then wiping all surfaces. Another swears by taking everything out of each room, disinfecting it all and then putting it back.

Some have warned against trusting competitors who, they say, only wipe down places that get touched a lot, like doorknobs or handles, or don't require workers to wear heavy-duty protective gear.

"Deep cleaning is really just a term they use to make the public feel warm and fuzzy," said Erick McCallum, founder of Texas-based the Cleaning Guys, which handled Ebola cleanup during a 2014 outbreak in Dallas.

Health experts say it's enough to clean frequently with soap, alcohol or bleach-based products. "You don't need any unusual procedures or cleaning agents," says Dr. Timothy Brewer, professor of medicine and epidemiology at UCLA.

During coronavirus or flu situations, worry about deep cleans only after a sick person recovers. The focus of the deep clean should be the bedroom and bathroom the sick person used.

Washing Hands

Handwashing is where it's at with home-proofing (other than staying home as much as possible). Everyone in the household should wash their hands thoroughly and frequently. If your hands are clean when they touch surfaces, there's nothing to disinfect.

However, there's something you need to do for all of that handwashing to work as it should. Moisturize!

Moisturize Sufficiently So That Handwashing Works

Why the need to moisturize? For one thing, soap and alcohol disinfectants lose some of their effectiveness on raw or damaged skin. Plus, if your hands hurt, you want to wash them less.

Also, germs and bacteria more easily enter your body through damaged or bleeding hands. That's not an issue with flu or coronavirus, but it's good to keep in mind.

Experts recommend ointments rather than lotions and creams. The alcohol in them could cause your skin to dry out even more. Store-brand ointments work just fine, so get what works for your budget.⁹

WASH YOUR HANDS REGULARLY

Handwashing can be a pain. That's especially true since you're supposed to do it seemingly one zillion times daily. Fortunately, once you get into the habit, handwashing becomes a breeze. Well, sometimes. If your hands become raw, injured or painful due to frequent handwashing, moisturize at least once a day and prioritize handwashing at the following times:

- *After getting home*
- *After coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose*
- *Before eating*
- *After the bathroom*
- *After eating*

Ideally, everyone in the household would handwash at all of these times:

- *Before, during and after preparing food*
- *Before eating*
- *Before inserting or removing contact lenses*
- *Before and after caring for someone sick or at higher risk*
- *Before and after treating a cut or wound*
- *After getting home*
- *After touching someone who has a cold or other illness*
- *After using the toilet*
- *After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet*
- *After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing*
- *After touching an animal, animal feed or animal waste*
- *After handling pet food or pet treats*
- *After touching garbage*

Follow these steps for effective handwashing:

- *Wash for at least 20 seconds.*
- *Lather all parts of your hands, including the backs, thumbs, between fingers and under the nails.*
- *Dry your hands thoroughly with a paper towel or fresh hand towel that you won't use again before washing it.*
- *Use the paper towel or cloth to turn off the tap.*



Timers come in especially handy to ensure you wash for at least 20 seconds.

They're nice to have when multiple household members are trying to step up their

handwashing regimen.

The type of soap you use doesn't really matter, although avoid foam if you can help it. Foam may not last for an entire 20-second handwash, while bar, liquid and gel soap will.

Hand sanitizer is an alternative to handwashing if you don't have access to soap and water. For instance, you need sanitizer if you live in an apartment building and press the elevator buttons.

Sanitizer isn't as effective as good old-fashioned handwashing, so handwash instead of sanitize when you can. With sanitizer, opt for a product containing at least 60% alcohol. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for use. Generally, rub your hands for 20 seconds until the sanitizer dries. Cover all of the surfaces you would for handwashing.

Seniors and Home-Proofing for COVID-19 and the Flu

Seniors are at particularly high risk of getting sick with COVID-19 and the seasonal flu. Fortunately, there's a lot they can do to empower themselves and minimize the risk. Home-proofing measures such as handwashing and disinfecting keep virus particles out of the home and can kill particles that are already inside.

When home-proofing, keep this quote in mind: "You are only as strong as your weakest link." It applies especially to multi-member households. Each person in the home must do their part to reduce the risk to seniors. That could mean, depending on how serious the situation is, that younger members in the household don't go out as often or that they cut down on their direct interaction with seniors. A bit of proactive behavior goes a long way.

VIEW FROM THE EXPERTS: SENIORS & HOME-PROOFING FOR COVID-19 AND THE FLU



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“Bleach will be a smart choice for most people right now, because it is widely available, inexpensive, and less wasteful than pre-moistened cleaning wipes. But it is very (very, very, very) important to use bleach carefully and responsibly.”

- Jolie Kerr, Cleaning Expert and Advice Columnist

<https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2020/3/23/21188690/coronavirus-cleaning-sanitizing-lysol-clorox-bleach-alcohol>



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“I actually see it [takeout and delivery] as a very good alternative since, unlike grocery shopping, it greatly reduces the need to interact with other people. The biggest risk factor for the disease [COVID-19] is interacting closely with other people, and contactless delivery eliminates that.”

- Benjamin Chapman, Food Safety Expert at North Carolina State University in Raleigh

<https://www.consumerreports.org/food-safety/coronavirus-common-questions-about-the-food-you-eat-food-safety/>



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“Keeping skin moisturized is important. If the skin is breaking down or raw, then the soap and alcohol disinfectants do not work as well. Also, when skin is chapped and broken, it's uncomfortable, and people can be less likely to wash their hands to prevent transmission of germs and infection.”

- Craig Shapiro, Attending Physician at Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Delaware

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/hand-washing-coronavirus-moisturizer-dry/2020/03/06/ede43874-5fcb-11ea-b014-4fafa866bb81_story.html



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“As long as you wash your hands thoroughly and regularly after opening it and don’t touch your nose and mouth ... that mail itself, that package, poses very little risk.”

- Julie Fischer, Research Professor at Georgetown University's Department of Microbiology and Immunology

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/handling-mail-amid-coronavirus-low-risk-wash-hands-69847293>

Additional Resources

Answers to Common Questions About Coronavirus and the Food You Eat: Could a Sick Restaurant Employee Contaminate Your Food? (Very Unlikely)

What Older Adults Need to Know about the Coronavirus: Guidance from the National Council on Aging

Cleaning and Disinfection for Households: Recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Are Amazon Packages Safe from Coronavirus? What to Know about Deliveries and Mail

Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2: List from the Environmental Protection Agency

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